

Circles



“Dialogue circles provide a safe, supportive space where all school community members can talk about sensitive topics, work through differences, and build consensus.” (edutopia)





Purposes

- Peacemaking/Discipline
- Classroom culture
- Academic

Peacemaking Circles

- Occur after harm has been caused
- Component of restorative practices/restorative justice
- Goals:
 - Teach students how to maintain positive classroom culture
 - Address harms that take place in classroom
 - Cultivate student communication skills



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Classroom Culture Circles

- Occur when classroom culture may feel toxic or uncultivated
- Goal: To build community





Academic Circles

- Occur as part of a lesson
- Goal: Encourage student engagement with content on a personal level

1. Ground rules

- a. Every member agrees to uphold

2. Opening

- a. Often mindfulness exercise, not always related to prompt

3. Prompt

- a. The meat of the circle: What are you there to talk about?

4. Closing

- a. Encourages reflection

Students always have the right to opt out of answering



Ground Rules Examples (might change depending on type of circle)

- Use “I” statements
- Principle of non-interference
- Respect the talking piece
- Listen to understand
- Without feeling rushed, say just enough



Opening Examples

- Share a happy childhood memory.
- If you could be a superhero, which superpower would you choose and why?
- How would your best friend describe you?
- If you could talk to someone from your family who is no longer alive, who it would be? What would you want to talk about?
- If you had an unexpected free day and could do anything you wished, what would you do?
- If you were an animal, what type would you be and why?
- What is a memory you have to time spent in nature?
- Who do you respect, and why?
- What would you NOT want to change about your life? Why?



Prompt Examples (Peacemaking Circle)

- What happened and what were you thinking at the time of the incident?
- What have you thought about since?
- Who has been affected by what happened and how?
- What about this has been hardest for you?
- What do you think needs to be done to make things as right as possible?



Closure Examples

- What can each of us do to keep this from happening in the future?
- Share two words to describe your experience in the circle today.
- Could be a final question about a certain text/resource





Current Applications

- The entire San Francisco Unified School District uses circles as part of their restorative practices resolution
 - Drop in suspensions, especially for boys of color
- Many teachers already use components of circles, but perhaps not the entire framework
- Ed White Middle School, San Antonio, TX
 - 44% drop in suspensions in first year of implementation



Future Directions for Research

- Circles are most widely used for their peacemaking capacity at this point. What effects do academic circles have on student learning?
- Is the drop in suspensions we see as a result of restorative circles because more teachers are trying circles instead of suspensions, or because misbehavior is actually decreasing?



Works Cited

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